

LIMERICK SOCIALIST

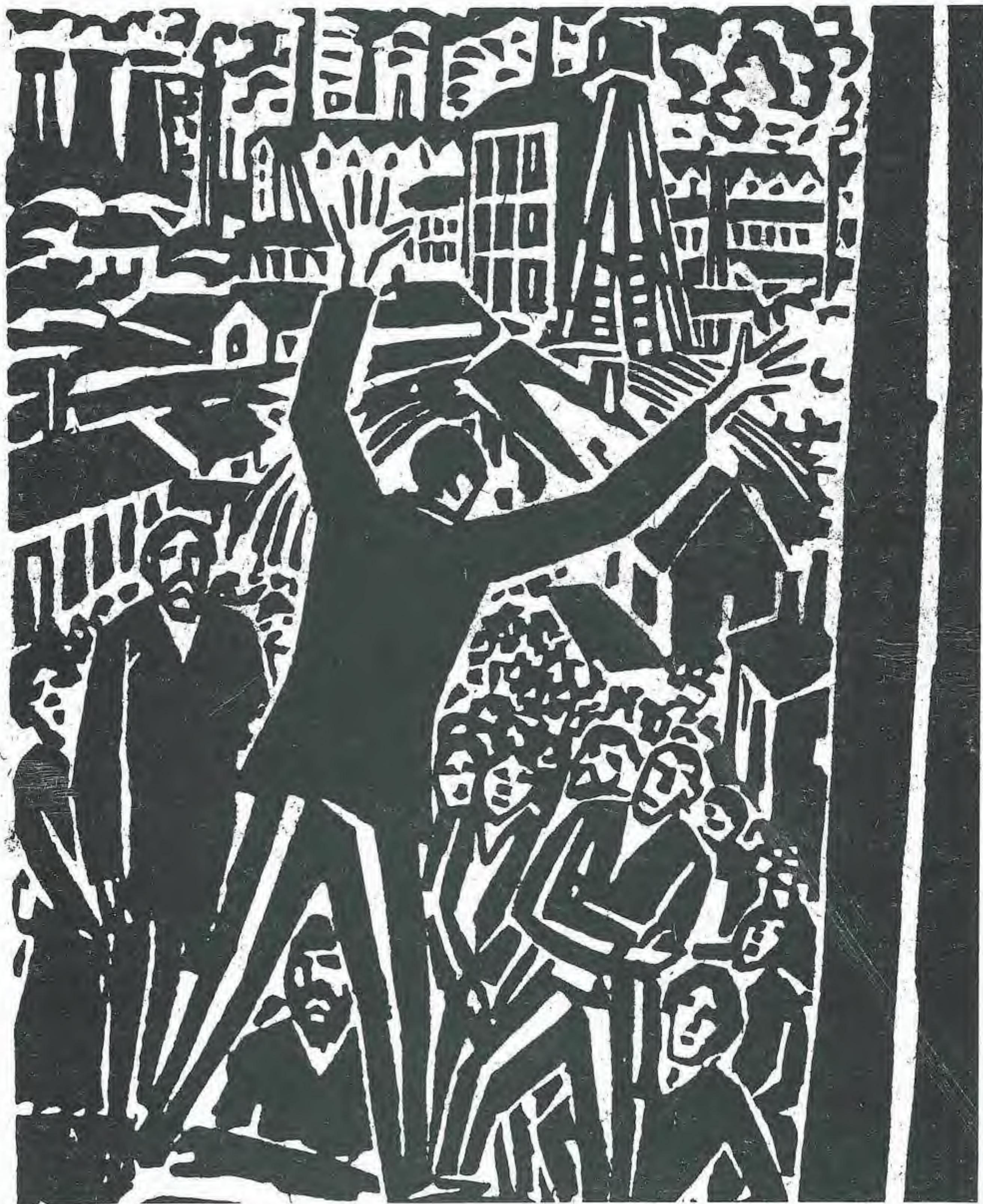
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THE
VOICE
OF THE
WORKER

'That which is good for the working class I esteem patriotic . . . James Connolly'



Political change

We publish below a speech given by Jim Kemmy to the Political Debating Society at the National Institute of Higher Education.

Ireland is changing very quickly today. We are no longer a rural isolated society. We have become industrialised, urbanised and members of the E.E.C. The average age of the people is younger. We also have a different structure of society. Thirty years ago most of the people made their living by working on family properties of some kind, family farms or family businesses. Nowadays most people make their living through wages and salaries. They are employed by people who are no relation of theirs, and so among other results we have seen a huge growth in trade union organisation during recent years.

Our cities and towns have also changed in many ways. They have grown much bigger. There is far greater geographical and social mobility than ever before, not only by people who leave the land but also by workers leaving home to take up employment in urban areas throughout the country.

The ideas of Irish people have greatly altered too. The average person is more tolerant now towards ideas that are different from his or her own. And there is a much greater variety of ideas going around, partly because it is accepted that we can learn things from people in other countries. Foreign influence is no longer condemned, except by a minority of very narrow-minded people, as being always a bad influence. And also, we are no longer prepared to put up with the outlandish censorship that we had two decades ago. It is only 14 years since Fianna Fail decided to change this law, because people were making a mockery of it. It was not possible any longer to stop people reading all the great writers who were on the blacklist. People were going to get hold of the books and read them whatever the government said, so Fianna Fail decided to make the law change with the times. The Censorship Board still does stupid things, but it is not any longer the mediaeval institution that it was 20 years ago, because the people would not put up with it.

Of all the things that are changing, the slowest to change is politics. But politics is one of the things which needs changing most. Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and the Labour Party are tied to the past in many ways. The whole political system is full of inequalities that we have inherited from the past and need to be challenged today.

Take employment. Chronic unemployment puts people in a position of second-class citizenship. In this country our unemployment rate has always been among the highest in Europe. At present there are 138,000 people out of work by the official figures, which is about 12 per cent of the working population. In Britain, despite two years of the worst that Margaret Thatcher can do, the unemployment rate is still slightly below ours. Yet unemployment is a major political issue in Britain. Here in the Irish Republic, it is not half as big a political issue as H-Block was, or rather it does not get half as much attention from the media and the TDs.

The established parties have never seriously pursued the aim of full employment. We are different from nearly every other European country in this regard. After the second World War, full employment became a major social priority in the rest of Europe. But here, instead of a full employment campaign in the late 1940s, we had an anti-partition campaign.

Emigration has been the official solution to unemployment. But that so-called solution has now been rejected by the people themselves. It is time to make a priority for politicians that every adult citizen should have the opportunity to work.

Women's inability to get equal opportunity in employment and equal pay for equal work, is another form of second-class citizenship. Women have now got some legal protection against this, but it was not given to them by the Irish political parties. It was imposed by the EEC in 1976 against the wishes of the Irish government.

Our law on family planning divides the citizens into two classes: those who can get access to family planning facilities and those who cannot and never will until the State is prepared to provide a comprehensive family planning service. Our constitutional prohibition on divorce and the undemocratic structure of our educational system discriminate against all who do not agree fully with the position of the Catholic Church on these issues.

Finally, our taxation system makes second-class citizens of the whole wage and salary earning population by comparison with farmers and other self-employed people. A lot of people marched two years ago demanding a fair taxation system. They have not got what they marched for. There are still two classes of taxable citizens: first-class farmers and the self-employed and second-class PAYE workers.

All these inequalities can be very quickly removed if a government is serious about removing them. There are deeper inequalities that will take longer to remove, such as the poverty in some city areas which has become a cycle and a tradition over generations. But much could be achieved quickly if any government wanted to, and our society makes nonsense of that phrase in the 1916 Proclamation which we all learned at school that "the Irish Republic will cherish all the children of the nation equally".

"To cherish all the children of the nation equally" is a socialist principle, although set in a nationalist context. Surely, if children of some other nation make their home here, they ought to be cherished just the same as the children of this nation? There are many British people who come to live and work here. They pay their taxes like the rest of us and, in the great majority of cases, obey the laws. Yet these people are not allowed to vote in our elections, although if we go over to Britain we can register to vote there. Charlie Haughey said that he intended to give the vote to British citizens living here, but another general election has gone by since then and they are still disenfranchised.

'To cherish all the people in the State equally' would be a more broad-minded and less exclusive way of expressing that principle in the 1916 Proclamation. But as it was written it shows the influence of James Connolly. We can see today that the State which was founded as a result of Connolly's work, among others, does not practise that principle and never has. I believe that Connolly was wrong to join in the 1916 Rising and merge the socialist movement into nationalism in the way that he did. Socialists have a duty to represent the workers and all disadvantaged people. They ought to stand on the principle that all the people in the State should be cherished equally, no matter what government is in power. But in Ireland the socialists could not do that, because they had no independence. They were messenger boys for the nationalist movement after 1916, and they got used to their passive role of waiting on the margin of politics and of society itself.

Considering how Irish society has become urbanised and industrialised over the past 20 years and that a large majority of people now do not make their living from their own property, we might think that the Labour Party should have grown very strong. About 1968 some people in the Labour Party thought it would all happen automatically and that in a few years Labour would be big enough to form the government on its own. "The Seventies will be Socialist!" was the clarion call. But it has not happened and it looks less likely than ever to happen now, and the reason is that the Labour Party is a prisoner of its own history. It has a deep-rooted inferiority complex in regard to Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, Fianna Fail especially. It has no vigour, no sense of purpose, no idea of what stage we have reached in Irish politics and what needs to be done. Above all it is not a serious political party, uncompromisingly committed to social change.

I believe that socialists have to make a clean break from the politics of the past and get to work on a comprehensive democratic programme for the future. The nationalist politicians have done their work. They have established an Irish state. But that state is riddled with social inequalities and with intolerant laws and narrow-minded political attitudes. And, as if all the inequalities of citizenship were not enough, it is official policy, as laid down in Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution, to impose citizenship on a community of people who do not want to be citizens of our State at all.

We have to come to terms with the will of the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland. They have been there for four centuries, for as long as the white man has been in America. They have built and worked in shipyards, engineering works and power stations. They have produced a modern industrial society. They are not going to leave this island; they are not going to be uprooted, and they are not going to unite with us against their will. For the last ten years the IRA has been trying to bomb Partition out of existence, but they have only bombed it deeper than it ever was before.

The hunger-strike in H-Block was another attempt by the IRA to get popular support and to drag the Southern Government and the people of the South along behind them. If they had managed to drag us along that road, at the end we would come

to an all-Ireland sectarian civil war. They have never worried about prison reform or about humanitarian issues; what they are interested in is trying to coerce the Protestant people. As long as we maintain the claim over Northern Ireland's territory in Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution, we are morally compromised in what the IRA is doing. The IRA is acting out of the logic of that claim over Northern Ireland's territory. The Coalition have no clear position on this. But they know that the people of the South do not want to go to war with the people of Northern Ireland. Fianna Fail are still tied to the old politics. They do not want to touch this bogus claim in the Constitution.

The only democratic policy is full recognition of the right of the majority in Northern Ireland to live in the state of their own choosing; and full recognition of the minority's entitlement to full civil and human rights.

One of the old Republican leaders, Kevin O'Higgins, once said in the Dail: "We must be the most conservative revolutionaries who ever made a revolution", and that was way back in the '20s. How right he was!

In the post-nationalist Ireland of today we need a new kind of revolution, one that points to the future rather than the past. We need a democratic socialist revolution to bring about the changes in our society to really treat all our people equally.

THREE NATIONS THEORY

A LETTER FROM A S.A.N. MEMBER

In the **Irish Times** report of the Senate debate on the Constitution (10/10/1981), Professor John A. Murphy is quoted as saying that "he rejected the two-nations theory of Mr. Jim Kemmy and his 'Socialists against Nationalism'. Further on, he is quoted as follows: "I do not believe that there is any such thing as an Irish Nation. He said there was a Gaelic nation; there was a Protestant nation; and there was a very vibrant Catholic nation. But there was not an Irish nation encompassing all three".

We can understand better now what Professor Murphy meant when he accused us at our recent public meeting in Cork of being simplistic. He rejects the two-nations theory because he holds a three-nations theory himself and he is offended when one of the three is left out of the picture. The problem is that the Professor seems to be living in the past and the present at the same time (a skill that nobody outside Fianna Fail can learn perfectly) and his nations are scattered all over the place, or rather, all over the time. To all appearances the "Gaelic nation" has long ago been incorporated into the Catholic nation, and with its full consent. We haven't heard of any separatist movements in Connemara lately. When Professor Murphy refers to a Protestant nation, it may be that he means the 18th century Protestant community headed by the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. But what about the Dissenters of Ulster, whose descendants form the bulk, especially of the working class, of what we indiscriminately call the Protestant community of

Northern Ireland today? The Dissenters were an uneasy and rebellious part of the Ascendancy's Protestant nation; some of them wanted to smash it up and build a comprehensive Irish nation in its place. When the Ascendancy sold its nation for a good price, and the Union was established, radicals like Samuel Neilson and Hamilton Rowan were quickly convinced that the basic grievance of the United Irish movement had been removed.

If the 18th century Protestant nation was bought out, and if the Protestant manufacturers, workers and tenant-farmers of Ulster did not become part of a comprehensive Irish nation, what happened to them? They became British nationals for all practical purposes. But when it appeared to them that Britain and Ireland were going to be tidied out from each other, one nation to one island, they felt that this was a bit simplistic, and made preparations to be a nation unto themselves, rather than be swallowed in the Irish Catholic nation. It seems strange to describe the community led by Flood and Grattan as a nation and yet deny that description to the community led by Carson and Craigavon. Professor Murphy appears to do this, but until he gets his three-nations theory sorted out, we just can't be sure.

John A. Minihan

GUARANTEED ULSTER

According to a report in the **Irish Times** of 13th of November, David Cook, Deputy leader of the Alliance Party, called on the SDLP to drop its demand for the ending of the "constitutional guarantee to Northern Ireland". The report continued: "Mr Cook said ... that in his opinion, Mr. John Hume chose to invent the word guarantee to describe this policy of consent in order to suggest to his supporters that it conferred some such privilege on Protestants".

It is always interesting to note the subtle propaganda involved in the choice of political terms. David Cook is quite right — there is no such thing as a "British Guarantee to Unionists". There is only a guarantee to the population of Northern Ireland that they may live in the state of their choice. That is quite another thing. Anyone who does not agree with this "guarantee" has no business making hypocritical condemnations of the IRA.

A TAXATION POLICY

The inequalities of the present taxation system represent one of the most urgent economic grievances facing the working class of the Republic. It is now almost three years since the campaign was launched to expose how the main burden of income tax was being carried by the PAYE sector. Several broad areas were singled out for reform: the PAYE sector was over-taxed through fixed income bands; capital taxation was absurdly low and had been getting lower; tax evasion was exceptionally high; and there was a huge imbalance in the distribution of the tax burden as between town and country. The campaign received massive support in the form of huge protest demonstrations held in all the major urban centres and sustained over a two year period. Yet to date the only discernible Government response has been an attempt to side step controversy by changing from high income tax to high rates of VAT. The Commission on Taxation set up by Fianna Fail hardly deserves a mention since only two out of its ten members are trade unionists and its report will not be published for several years.

Any progressive tax system should be based on the following four minimum objectives:

- * To raise adequate revenue to finance the public services, the system of social welfare at a realistic level, and Government measures aimed at increasing the national productive capacity.
- * To ensure that the principle of "equality of sacrifice" is adhered to in the application of taxes.
- * To effect a redistribution of wealth.
- * To coordinate the tax system with progressive economic aims wherever possible e.g. tax incentives for industrial investment, reducing inflation by taking VAT off certain items like school books or tax measures which help to modernise the economy.

Before examining the specific proposals for reform it is essential that one aspect of the political background is made clear. Over the last twenty years the Republic has been in transition from a largely agricultural society in which the values of the small farmer and the small businessman were held to be the ideal, to a largely urban society where the working class make up a majority of the population. Rapid social change has been taking place while in politics the changes have been minor.

On the question of a major tax reform however, the interests of the traditional petit-bourgeois sector of the economy run directly counter to the interests of the majority in the modern sector. Progressive tax changes like a clamp-down on tax evasion or the introduction of a substantial resource tax on agriculture may well have the effect of speeding up the decline of the older section. The whole question therefore has implications, both political and social which strike at a very sensitive nerve for the main parties.

MEASURES TO REDUCE TAX EVASION

The amount of tax evaded each year is impossible to calculate for obvious reasons. If it is considered that the 6,000 tax dodgers actually caught in 1979 were only a tiny percentage of the whole and that no detailed examination of tax returns takes place unless there are glaring discrepancies the figure of £100 million per annum can be taken as a conservative estimate. The worst area for avoidance in income tax is the very large self-employed category which includes small businesses, a small number of farmers and certain of the professions. As a means of ensuring that the self-employed pay their share of tax 10% of all self employed tax returns should be selected on a random basis for thorough examination by the Revenue Commissioners (the system currently used in the U.S.), and in order to make the system effective an increase in the size and scope of the tax authorities is essential.

A trend during the seventies was that while several progressive taxes were introduced like Capital Gains Tax, Capital Acquisitions and Wealth Tax there were so many

loopholes that a relatively small amount of actual revenue was collected. If it proves impossible to fill the loopholes under present taxes new taxes on property or capital must be introduced. The success of the Banks in discovering loopholes to cut down on tax payments makes them a special case. Businesses should be prevented from passing on capital allowances to the Banks and the principle of a tax on windfall bank profits should be extended.

A programme of tax reform which does not include specific measures to clamp down on the exceptionally high rate of avoidance that occurs in the Republic, would merely bolster the present inequities.

2. A RESOURCE TAX ON AGRICULTURE

Taxation in agriculture needs to serve two purposes: the farming community must pay its fair share of national taxation, and the tax should act as an incentive to efficient agricultural production. All economic surveys and reports on the subject are agreed that Irish agriculture functions at only a fraction of its potential. A large part of the problem is that too much land is in the hands of farmers who are unable or unwilling to adopt new ideas about farm management. It is essential that the type of taxation used on farming profits should be such that it encourages the conservative inefficient farmers to make way for those who can achieve a much higher productivity.

The most progressive method of farmer taxation is what the National Economic and Social Council call a "Rigorous National Tax System". Under this system the average income of each class of land in each year is estimated. The farmer would be informed of the imputed income from his farm and hence the amount of tax he would have to pay for that year. There is thus a powerful inbuilt incentive to efficient production. The principle of a national tax on agriculture was partially accepted by Fianna Fail (or rather the Lynch wing of Fianna Fail) when in the 1980 Budget a resource tax was, introduced. The tax only affected farms of 140 acres and over and farmers had the option of paying it "relation to either farm size or income". It was therefore inadequate on several counts and yet it has been scrapped in direct response to political pressure mounted by farming interests.

For the tax year 1979/80 farmers were due to pay £6½ million in resource tax. The vast majority simply refused to pay. Fianna Fail under Haughey responded with an assurance that the tax would be abolished after one year while making no effort to collect the amount of tax outstanding, and shortly after attaining office the Coalitions Minister for Agriculture Alan Dukes went one step further and promised to repay the tiny amount of resource tax that had been collected.

For the same tax year the PAYE sector was due to pay £891.7 million and 98.5% of it has been paid. Farmers pay other tax besides resource tax but it is very difficult to quantify as it is included under the self-employed income tax category. In 1978 87% of total income tax revenue came from the PAYE sector which makes up 70% of the total labour force and in 1977 accounted for about 66% of national income, while a mere 1% was contributed by farmers who in 1977 made up 13.5% of the labour force and accounted for 18.4% of national income.

It has been clear over the last few years that the farming community have every intention of fighting to preserve their privileged position in the tax system, and looking at the political parties it is very likely that they will succeed. Fianna Fail and Fine Gael have always been in competition for the right to represent rural interests in the Dail, the Labour Party receives surprisingly high votes from rural areas, a fact which presents it from even mentioning the subject of agricultural tax; and on the left SFWP is noso weighed down by the Sinn Fein tradition that it will never attract substantial working class support.

3. HIGHER CAPITAL TAXATION

The function of capital taxation is to achieve greater social equality by redistributing wealth not being used for investment

purposes. Compared to other EEC countries the level of capital tax in our system is extremely low and during the last six years it has been decreasing. At present there are good grounds for believing that wealth is actually being redistributed in the opposite direction to that intended — from wage earners to the wealthy.

Until 1975 the main form of form of capital tax was estate duties which brought in a paltry £12.13 million (1.6% of total revenue). This was replaced by Capital Gains Tax, Capital Acquisitions Tax and the Wealth tax which in five years have brought £50 million into the exchequer — in real terms the equivalent of one year's estate duties. Briefly what happened is that in 1974 the Coalition Government proposed in a White Paper a new system of capital tax to replace estate duties and take in roughly the same amount of revenue. The measures caused such a storm of controversy stirred up by wealthy interests that the Government watered down its proposals very significantly. The Fianna Fail Government subsequently abolished Wealth tax and applied a further reduction to Capital Gains Tax. This ludicrous situation highlights the lack of an effective and vigorous working class party in Irish politics.

Capital Gains Tax (tax on profits made through the sale of property or other assets) should be applied at a minimum rate of 35% (the original 1974 proposal) and the number of exemptions reduced.

Capital Acquisitions Tax (inheritance tax) should have lower thresholds and the rate of tax on gifts should be the same as that on inheritances.

Wealth Tax should be re-introduced at a new rate of 3%.

4. HIGHER CORPORATION TAX

Corporation tax is the tax on company profits. The situation at present is as follows: profits on exports are tax free; profits of

manufacturing industry are taxed at 10%; for companies not engaged in manufacture or exports the top rate of 45% applies if profits are in excess of £25,000, with a sliding scale if profits are lower; and all companies which are liable to corporation tax can write off expenditure on buildings and machinery against tax (the system of capital allowances).

The justification for this system is that low company tax helps to attract foreign industry to the Republic and the various differentials in the tax are designed to boost investment in the economically important areas of industry. It should be said that even under this exceedingly generous arrangement private industry is not investing anywhere near sufficient funds to solve the problem of unemployment. Ultimately the establishment of proper planning institutions and the expansion of public enterprise offers the best prospect for using public money to combat unemployment and in this context the present arrangement allows private companies to receive public money (by not having to pay their share of tax) without the slightest provision for public accountability.

However the most urgent economic priority remains the provision of jobs in the existing political and economic circumstances. While the political system is dominated by conservative parties and while the public sector is run by managers 'with little commitment to public enterprise' the DSP supports the principle of using the tax system to encourage investment. We also support the bias in favour of exports and in the bias in favour of manufacturing companies.

A higher rate of corporation tax should be applied on all companies.

There are at present many small companies not engaged in manufacture which employ very few people and yet which benefit enormously from the system of capital allowances. This abuse of the system must be ended.

Other tax reform proposals are as follows:

5. Indexation of Tax Allowances and Bands under PAYE.
6. Equality of Treatment as between Married People.
7. Reduction of VAT on Books.

DISPUTED TERRITORY

As for the summit communique, we don't want to join the parsing contest. Few things could be more ridiculous than the quarrel Haughey picked with FitzGerald over the significance of the grammar used by each of them, in May 1980 and November 1981, when agreeing with Margaret Thatcher that there could be no change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland without the consent of a majority there.

On one level, the conflict in Northern Ireland is a conflict between the British and Irish Governments. They dispute who is to govern the place. The two Governments are not at war with each other over their dispute, even though there is a war in the disputed area over who shall govern it. The idea that the two governments should build political links with each other, try to choke off the sources of grievance and co-operate in bringing peace to the disputed area has a lot to be said for it. Unfortunately, this can hardly be done while the disputed area remains disputed; both sides must first recognise the right to self-determination of that area's citizens.

In the Anglo-Irish context, this means that Articles 2 and 3 of the Republic's Constitution must go. FitzGerald and his crusade are all very well, but we must point out that the crusader hasn't yet fought a serious battle against the infidel; Articles 2 and 3 still stand.

ANGLO-IRISH HOT AIR

Ironically, one of the Anglo-Irish joint studies is a study on measures to encourage mutual understanding. Somehow or other, the civil servants and their political bosses would seem to be queering their own pitch. The parties who require to be made understand one another have already developed a hundred and one different ideas of what all this Anglo-Irish hocus-pocus is about.

Let's take five of them. The IRA have announced a new victory for neo-colonialism, a movement towards the dependence of all Ireland on Britain. Charles Haughey, more temperately, says the anti-partitionist movement has suffered a reverse. Garrett FitzGerald says the opposite is the case: the British Government has returned to its Sunningdale position of goodwill towards goodwill between North and South. Ian Paisley smells an elaborate plot to get the North politically entangled with the South. Margaret Thatcher maintains that the proposed Anglo-Irish structures are comparable to the existing Anglo-French and Anglo-German structures and have no direct bearing on the future of Northern Ireland, which is an internal matter for the United Kingdom.

The range of all possible opinions is represented in the above list ... almost. There is one other possible opinion: neither party, (Anglo or Irish) has any clear idea of what it's doing and jointly they have not yet blundered into doing anything significant. It is difficult to discover anything from a reading of the tedious Anglo-Irish studies except 101 ideas, some of them new, on how Anglos and Irish could blow hot air at each other.

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THE CORPORATION

FROM SHAWN-A-SCOUB

A CHARITY DELEGATE AND A
POOR MAN'S CAT.

A STORY OF THE HARD FROST, 1867.

One dreary winter—'tis not long ago—
The surly wind-god of the northern sky
Filled earth with such a stock of frost and snow,
That people wondered at the great supply—
“Awful hard weather!” was the general cry
Of everyone you'd meet about the town;
Some to resist it took a *drop in the eye*,
And others quietly by the fire sat down;
While yet the hard North blew, and snowed, and froze
So keenly, 'twould bite off the devil's nose.

Hardware men did good trade by selling skates
To all the adventurous sporters of both sexes,
Who puffed themselves on doing wonderous feats
By cutting on the ice Z's and X's.
Some at the practise got a—battering seats;
'Tis very wholesome fun, yet nothing vexes
A fellow more than when he comes down thump,
And gets *behind an equinoctial bump*.

The frost continued on both day and night,
Till skates could not be had at any price;
Each day it was a most exciting sight
To see a world of people on the ice.
Ladies on skates *progressing very nice*,
Who sometimes paid with bumps for their delight;
All who transgressed strict equilibrium's rules
Were sure to find themselves, going home, lame fools.

Sure in this world there's no amusement cheaper—
Provided a poor devil don't get hurt;
Even grey old men went out to cut a caper,
And deemed themselves mere striplings at the sport;
Their blunt skates tore the ice, even as a draper
Tears flimsy calicoe to make a shirt;
Thus all enjoyed the frost-god's crystal floor—
All, save the shivering, ragged, hungry poor.

Who in old rooms and garrets grouped together—
Some o'er the sparkless ashes sat like dummies;
While others prayed the Lord to change the weather,
Before they'd be all frozen into mummies.
Ah! little do the wealthy ones consider

What a cold garret or a fireless room is,
Where on the patient, perishing inmates blow
Thro' broken roof and pane, wind, frost, and snow.

At that time there was one who did consider
Poor people, with a pitying heart and eye;
He knew they were not made of wood or leather
To stand the rigour of the freezing sky;
And so he called a Committee together,

Six hundred beds and blankets from his store,
To be distributed amongst the poor.

You may have asked me, who was this good man?
I plainly tell you 'tis Sir Peter Tait,
Who for his goodness, from the cleric clan
Got fire and brimstone and the devil to eat;
On all sides, at him, like mad dogs they ran,
And bit and tore him at the devil's rate.
What man could bear so much unmerited evil?
He left them and the City to the devil.

The Committee was one of knaves and blockheads,
And mustered up, at least, a goodly dozen;
If Mr. Frost touched not their trade or pockets,
They cared not if the human race were frozen.
They only wished to glitter like sky rockets;
And when the elected twelve were duly chosen,
They took the name of *Charitable Directors*,
And to visit the poor appointed six inspectors.

Those fellows had as much charity as rats
In a country graveyard, tho' their words were neat
They also had as much honesty as cats
Which play with the poor victims that they eat.
They got good names as smooth as new silk hats,
At the expense of good Sir Peter Tait;
Ah! many a thousand gave he unregarded,
And the Lord knows how well he was rewarded.

All applications to the Committee,
On slips of note-paper were to be sent;
And the inspectors were told off to see
Minutely what the applicants really meant;
And so they set to work industriously,
For they were very cautious to prevent

Any or everything like imposition
So often practised on a like occasion.

From every part the applications flew
Showering, like snow-flakes on a mountain sward;
The Chairman and the Committee looked blue,
To find such paper-pyramids on the board;
And still the piles increased and hourly grew,
Until the Chairman in a passion roared—
“Stop them, by Heaven! why, who the devil would think
They’d funds to purchase all this paper and ink?”

Among the paper-babel he espied
One note that bore a curious superscription;
And so he broke the seal and closely eyed
The scrawl that seemed a mess of fact and fiction;
It jingled like a bell all at one side;
’Twas poverty’s comedy without contradiction;
He read the epistle for the Committee,
And here’s a copy which he gave to me.

Your humble servant, Darby Crotty,
Who keeps a cabin old and sooty
At the Nor’east end of the city,
Applies to you for help—and no pity!
For at this end, because ’tis older
Than all the rest—the times are colder;
I have a family numbering five,
And ’tis a miracle they’re alive;
Yet they’re so used to cold and hunger,
They seem resolved to live the longer;
For if they saw either food or fire,
Why, hang me, if they wouldn’t expire.
We’ve nothing but the roof to cover us,
Thro’ which you’d read the blue sky over us;
The snow comes thro’ in such a shower.
You’d think that we were grinding flour.
The little “sop” on which we lay,
Was seven years old last Lady Day;
But while, last week, for Mass I waited,
A hungry ass walked in and eat it.
My trade was once a cattle drover,
But now these good old times are over;
For since the trains began to run,
My business is completely done.
This is an honest plain confession;
I’ll leave the rest to your discretion;
To send us something like a bed,
And keep us from being frozen dead.
Tho’, since the first night of my wedding,
I never had a bed nor bedding,

Except the hay that hungry ass
Had swallowed while I was at Mass.
So send me, ere I shall be lost,
A bed to save me from the frost;
And, faith, when the fine weather sets in,
I’ll send it back to you again.

This Darby was a droll fellow—sixty-two—
And tho’ bad luck was always at him poking;
Thro’ all the black misfortune which he knew,
It had no power to hinder him from joking;
And so whatever way the weather blew,
In every disappointment most provoking,
He never lost his temper’s pleasant tone,
Through cold and want had worn him to the bone

He had a cat—like Whittington’s—a pet
Of extra size, in colour black and white;
And he used from a neighbouring butcher get
Sometimes a calf’s, a sheep’s, or bullock’s light;
And tho’ the children often felt a whet
To seize the meat—he’d snatch it out of sight,
And give it to the cat which growled and mewed,
While in the corner the repast she chewed.

The Chairman, after reading Darby’s nose,
At once called one of the inspectors to him;
And told him to get on his overcoat,
And go in search of Darby and review him.
The fellow set off like an Alpine goat,
Assuring first “his honour” that he knew him,
And would bring back, to his great satisfaction,
Every particular of the transaction.

He was an impudent, officious fellow,
That left undone or overdid his duty;
He wore a moustache dark-red and yellow,
And really deemed himself a stunning beauty;
His brow was narrow and his cheek was sallow,
And his short nose was like a bit of putty
Stuck on his phiz, between his whiskers flowing,
Just to denote the way the craft was going.

There is a pig-souled ignoramus race
Of supercilious rascals in this country,
Who won’t do anything in any case.
Except they spice the business with effrontry;
Those spurious muck-worms of power and place,
Who’d eat the dirt that’s trodden by the gentry,
To play the rotten, crawling, cowering slaves,
And act towards all beneath them tyrant-knaves.

ASSASSINATIONS

WORDS AS WEAPONS

Certain words and catchphrases leap to prominence, and often take on new meanings during every crisis, and during every war. "Initiatives", "Political solutions", "Vacuums" and the like have been the stuff of many's the headline this last ten years. A more serious and more revealing feature has been the use of term "sectarian assassination". Time was when an assassination usually meant the death of a king, president or some other bigwig. In the course of the present war on Northern Ireland, the word "assassination" has come to refer to the killing of ordinary men and women.

But there is a political history to the use of the term. In the Southern media, "sectarian assassination" has been the term used only for those who have no connection with the security forces, and who have never had such a connection. So, we read of the "sectarian assassination" of an individual in a Catholic area, and we read of the "killing" (nowadays, sometimes the "murder") of an R.U.C. man or woman, an R.U.C., reservist, a U.D.R. member, or even of an old man who used to be, some years back, a member of the U.D.R.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Does it matter what words the media use when recounting these killings? Yes, it does. It matters because the impression is given that there is a huge qualitative difference between those killings the media term "sectarian" and the others. At the most basic human level, this obscures for the 'distant' southern reader or viewer, the fact that the R.U.C. man in the Protestant community is the copper who grew up on your street, whose father drinks in your boozer, whose sister is married to your brother, whose kids go to school with yours. It obscures the fact that the RUC reservist or UDR part-timer is a neighbour, a workmate in office or factory, a trade-unionist, a member of the football team or social club or whatever. It obscures the fact that in areas like Fermanagh, where the Protestant community have, despite every provocation, so far refused to be drawn into illegal paramilitary activity, a high proportion of ordinary workers and farmers are UDR part-timers. In its impact on the community, the killing of RUC and UDR personnel is just as sectarian as the killing of an individual who never had connections with the security forces.

But the selective use of the term "sectarian" obscures a wider truth as well: the essentially sectarian nature of the IRA campaign. That campaign is fundamentally aimed at breaking the resistance of the Ulster Protestant community. Its directors are aware that their real enemy is that community. To achieve their aims, it must either be broken or wiped out. By intimidation and murder, a serious attempt is being made at wiping it out at a local border level — pushing back the border, if you like. That is what Owen Carron, Bernadette McAliskey and the like actually stand for.

EYE-OPENERS

In won't work. For one thing, the resolve of the Ulster Protestants is too great. For another, the mass involvement of Southerners, which would be needed for any serious attempt at moving from parochial genocide to the real thing, is not going to happen. But it's time we did more down here to make them realise that. Ritual condemnations of murder don't cut much ice. We could open the eyes of the Provos somewhat to the futility and waste of what they're at if we extradited terrorists to Northern Ireland, and also took steps to scrap Articles 2 and 3, which reassure the Provos that, despite our qualms about their methods, we too want the fourth green field back, regardless of the wishes of its inhabitants.

EVADING THE ISSUE

Garret FitzGerald has said that Articles 2 and 3 of our constitution represent an unjustified territorial claim to Northern Ireland. One would expect his partners in government, the Labour party, to have some public position on so serious a matter. But it seems there is such confusion in the Labour Party that they prefer to avoid the issue. It has become standard practice among confused left-wingers to rationalise their refusal to confront this claim — the ideological basis of the IRA campaign — by suggesting that where the sacred cows of anti-partitionism are concerned, discretion is definitely the better part of valour.

John Throne of the Militant faction within the Labour Party recently defended this position in a letter to the Irish Times opposing our call for opposition to Articles 2 and 3. Such a debate, he said, would allow the right-wing reactionary nationalists a field day for beating tribal drums. Isn't that a strange political philosophy for a socialist: that one shouldn't enter into political controversy with right-wing reactionaries for fear of them winning? Should we, instead, cede them the field of battle without firing a shot?

LABOUR AND FIANNA FAIL

But perhaps it is only in matters nationalist that we should refrain from such controversy. After all, if we agree with the right-wing reactionaries, that would be a good reason for not taking them on in public debate, though it would not explain why we seem to be so lacking in conviction that we must avoid openly supporting them.

The fact is that the Labour Party accepts unquestioningly the framework of sacrosanct nationalist aims as laid down by Fianna Fail, and is ever anxious to prove itself as true an upholder of these sacred truths as their inventors. It now finds itself with a leftover Fianna Fail policy ("unity by consent") which it never had the guts to argue seriously once Fianna Fail ditched it. Now, to judge by Michael O'Leary's latest utterances, they are trying to update themselves by sidling towards current Fianna Fail policy; to wit, that the Brits must help us implement Articles 2 & 3.

SOCIALIST NATIONALISM?

Naturally, Mr. Throne would like to have some socialist gloss on Labour's version of Fianna Fail policy. His united Ireland would be socialist (like the seventies, maybe?) and based on considerations of workers' unity. When and if we ever get near to establishing a socialist society here, it will be time enough to propose a socialist united Ireland. In the meantime, since the British Labour Party is more radical than its Irish counterpart, and much more likely to come to power under its own steam; there is no reason for Northern Ireland, if it wants socialism, to secede from the UK and join the Republic. As for workers' unity, it seems to escape the notice of many socialist "internationalists" that uniting Ireland does not mean abolishing a border; it means relocating it between Northern Irish and British workers. Whatever dictates this preference for such selective workers' unity, it is not socialist internationalism.

The argument for the South's territorial claim has nothing to do with socialism. It has to do with the honest-to-God, straightforward nationalist tenet that the island of Ireland contains a single homogeneous social entity, which is now artificially divided, and it follows from this that we, the majority in the island, have a right to rule the north with or without the consent of its inhabitants. If the Labour Party supports this view, why is it ashamed to say so? Perhaps some of its members feel it sounds a little undemocratic so they prefer to be evasive. But if members of the Party do not support this view, they should publicly oppose Articles 2 & 3 and their echo in their Party constitution.